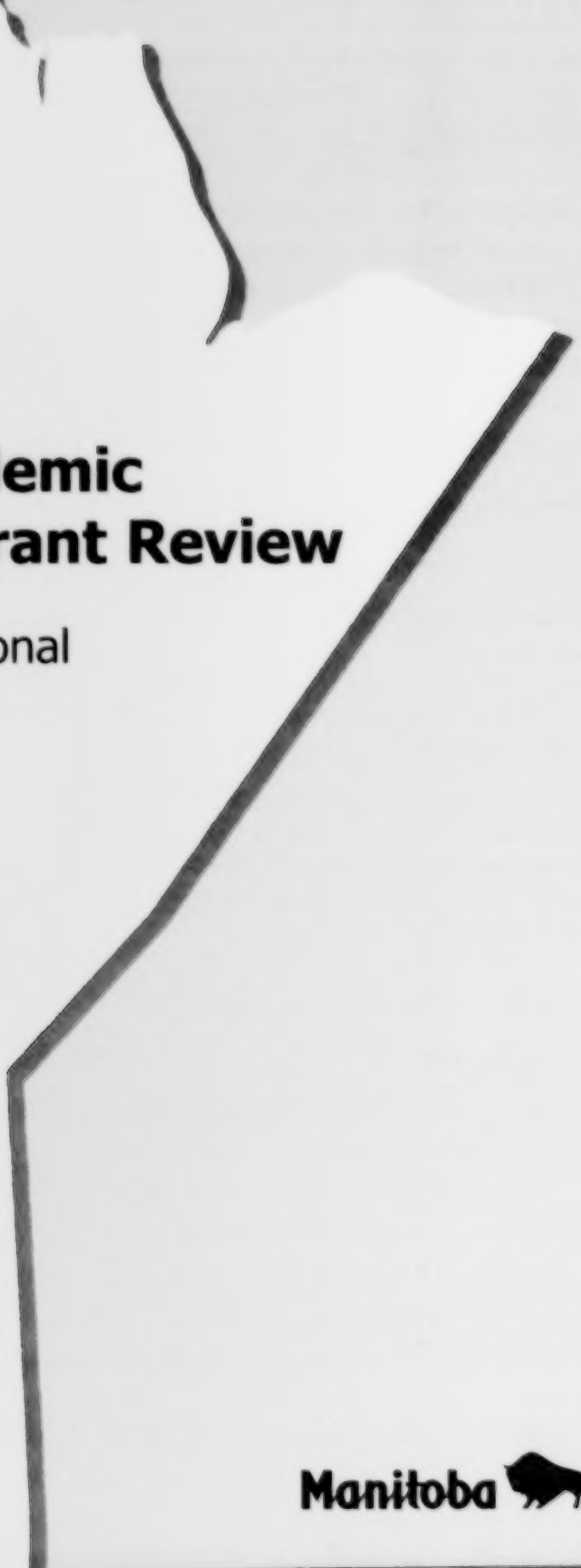
Aboriginal Academic Achievement Grant Review

Highlights of the Regional Discussion Sessions



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This resource is also available on the Manitoba Education website at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/aaa>.

Websites are subject to change without notice.

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Acknowledgements

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Aboriginal Academic Achievement Grant Review: Highlights of the Regional Discussion Sessions

Introduction

Aboriginal Academic Achievement Grant Review: Highlights of the Regional Discussion Sessions provides highlights from regional sessions with parents and school division representatives. During these sessions, participants reviewed and discussed Aboriginal education in Manitoba schools.

Review Goals

The Aboriginal Academic Achievement (AAA) Grant review was conducted to obtain information about the AAA Grant's effectiveness in supporting programming that targets and attains academic success for Aboriginal students. More specifically, the purpose of the review was to

- Identify successful practices, including professional learning activities, that best promote learning and increase student academic success.
- Examine the role of parents and community members in school and division efforts to enhance educational success for Aboriginal students.
- Identify areas of consensus and differing perspectives on ways of strengthening the impact of AAA programming on academic success.
- Determine whether any adjustments are necessary to improve the impact of AAA programming on student academic success.

Process

In April, May, and June of 2009, regional discussion sessions were held with school division representatives in

- The Pas
- Carman
- Winnipeg (two sessions)
- Brandon (two sessions)

Parent discussion sessions were held in

- The Pas
- Winnipeg
- Brandon

Over 30 parents and more than 70 representatives from 32 school divisions participated in the regional discussion sessions.

Review Questions

Parents were asked the following questions:

- What are the most important actions that your child's school can take to help him or her feel welcome, have a sense of belonging, and be a successful learner?
- Is your presence and input welcomed at your child's school? What can be done to make parents feel welcome, comfortable, and involved?
- Are you aware of the supports, resources, and extracurricular activities available to your child through the school and its partners? What are some important ones for you?

School division representatives were asked the following questions:

- What processes does your school division use to allocate its AAA funding to schools, projects, and related activities? Essentially, how does your school division decide to use its funding?
- What types of AAA programming, including professional learning and parental and community involvement activities, have had the greatest impact on the academic success of Aboriginal students? Why do you think this is the case?
- What types of assessment activities and indicators of success does your school division use to determine the impact of AAA programming on the success of students?
- What are the most significant points that your school division has learned with its AAA Grant?
- Should Manitoba Education use the Aboriginal identity declaration information that it collects from school divisions or census data from Statistics Canada to calculate its funding support?

Discussion Session Highlights

Parents said the following in response to the questions asked:

- Aboriginal children require a strong understanding of their culture, particularly given situations where the culture is not taught at home. Successful Aboriginal people have a strong positive identity.
- Students need to learn more about their history, culture, and ceremonies. Aboriginal languages should be part of the curriculum and a continuum of language courses needs to be available to students.
- Culturally relevant school events and activities can help students experience school positively.
- Non-Aboriginal students, school staff, and the public should be better informed about Aboriginal culture and education to help address misunderstanding. Cultural orientations, in the form of two-day workshops, were recommended for administrators and school board members.
- A larger Aboriginal presence in school staffing and an increased use of Elders would help support student learning. Professional learning for teachers regarding Aboriginal culture should be mandatory.
- Parents desire more opportunities to engage with school divisions and schools in a meaningful way. This includes participation on divisional and school advisory committees.
- Racism and segregation still exist. Grade 9 continues to be a particularly challenging year for Aboriginal students. Students require support transitioning into high school.

School division representatives said the following in response to the questions asked:

- Programming with an emphasis on community partnerships has the greatest impact on the academic success of Aboriginal students. Schools need to work with the entire Aboriginal community and not simply with the Aboriginal students in the school.
- Aspects of community involvement include recruiting community members to work and volunteer in the school, providing community/cultural spaces such as parent rooms, an Aboriginal students' centre in the school, and outdoor/medicine wheel classrooms.
- Aboriginal liaison/community workers can be effective at opening school doors. Cultural advisors help to provide linkages to both worlds, serve as role models for healthy lifestyles, and have a significant impact on the academic success of Aboriginal students.
- Extracurricular activities, such as music and sports, have helped students on the edge find space in school. Various types of gatherings and festivals help to strengthen school-community connections.

- AAA funding is used for a variety of purposes: Aboriginal support teachers, Aboriginal community support workers, social workers, Aboriginal education consultants, liaison officers, Aboriginal language teachers, and high school success coaches.
- Funding also supports alternative or specialized programming, Early Years learning support, language arts and mathematics programming, professional learning, artists in residence, and a variety of cultural programming.
- Aboriginal perspectives fit well into the curriculum—language arts, science, and mathematics—and can be integrated naturally into the curriculum without requiring a lot of extra work.
- Teachers need to build confidence in their ability to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum and understand that these efforts involve more than simply offering crafts. Learning about cultural infusion involves more than one-day workshops.
- Community involvement is crucial for the development of definitions and indicators of Aboriginal student success.
- AAA funding is largely allocated on the basis of AAA plans submitted by individual schools to division administrators for approval. There were a few instances where AAA funding was allocated on the basis of a divisional strategy or a divisional strategy coupled with individual school plans.
- Either approach to determining AAA funding—using census data or Aboriginal identity information—has its advantages and disadvantages. A number of participants indicated support for the use of identity information as it was considered more relevant for planning and programming purposes and more likely to provide an accurate count of students. More effort, however, is required to provide families with information on the purposes and benefits of declaration.
- A drop in Aboriginal students' literacy levels was observed as they moved from Grades 5 and 6 to Grades 7 and 8 through to Grade 9.
- Grade 9 continues to present difficulties for Aboriginal students. Little differentiation of instruction, a strong curriculum emphasis, and strict attendance policies were cited as some of the issues that presented challenges for students.
- Considerably more work is required to help support students transition from the Middle to the Senior Years.
- The need to improve student engagement and sense of belonging, particularly for those students transitioning from First Nations communities, was identified as an area of concern.

Recommendations

Divisional Planning and Consultation

In the area of divisional planning and consultation, it is recommended that

- school divisions establish divisional AAA (or Aboriginal education) planning processes and plans with specific priorities and goals that enhance the coherency of policies and actions in support of Aboriginal students
- school divisions establish an Aboriginal education or an AAA Grant Steering Committee with representation from the Aboriginal community to help develop divisional goals and discuss AAA funding allocation in support of Aboriginal students

Specific Actions

With respect to specific actions, it is recommended that

- school divisions consult with Aboriginal parents to help identify school community priorities and interests
- Manitoba Education and school divisions continue to host AAA gatherings to share knowledge, expertise, and good practice in Aboriginal education
- Manitoba Education work in partnership with school divisions, parent groups, and organizations such as the Aboriginal Circle of Educators to promote Aboriginal identity declaration

Aboriginal Perspectives and Professional Learning

In the area of Aboriginal perspectives and professional learning, it is recommended that

- Manitoba Education work with school divisions to enhance teachers' and schools' confidence and capacities to include Aboriginal perspectives in curriculum and pedagogy, particularly into the Early and Middle Years

Specific Actions

With respect to specific actions, it is recommended that

- Manitoba Education, in collaboration with school divisions, develop Elders/Knowledge Keepers in Schools programming to support school divisions and schools in their work with their communities, and explore funding opportunities/options for this work

- Manitoba Education, in collaboration with school divisions, develop a bundle of learning resources (e.g., lists of names of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and mentors who can work with school communities; anthologies of personal stories and poetry; novels; audio files of stories; video files of activities; curriculum modules that strengthen student comprehension of Indigenous science) to support the development of culturally responsive schools
- Manitoba Education expand the AAA website to share good practice in Aboriginal education
- Manitoba Education work with the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC) on the implementation of the document *Working Together: Supporting Students in Transition: Sharing Student Information between First Nations and Provincial Schools**

*Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, and Manitoba Education. *Working Together: Supporting Students in Transition: Sharing Student Information between First Nations and Provincial Schools.* (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, 2010).
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